

# PUBLICITY

*Some of the Things It Is  
and Is Not*

By

IVY L. LEE

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ADDRESSES delivered before the American Association of Teachers of Journalism, Chicago, the Advertising Club of New York, and the Annual Convention of American Electric Railway Association, including also Questions and Answers relating to Principles and Methods

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## NOTE

**T**HE first of the two addresses reprinted in this volume was delivered in substantially the same form before the American Association of Teachers of Journalism at Chicago on December 30, 1924, and before the Advertising Club of New York on January 20, 1925.

The questions and answers included in the second chapter relate to this address but are divided into two sections for the reason that they differed substantially on the two occasions.

The third chapter contains an address delivered on October 10, 1916, before the Annual Convention of the American Electric Railway Association at Atlantic City which would appear to be equally pertinent at the present time.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. PUBLICITY AND PROPAGANDA.....	7
2. ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT PUBLICITY....	25
3. PUBLICITY AS APPLIED TO PUBLIC SERVICE CORPORATIONS .....	44

# I

## Publicity and Propaganda\*

**I** WANT to tell you something of my conception of publicity and propaganda.

In the first place, unlike many people, I do not view publicity as "press-agentry." I hear advertising agents occasionally say to me, "Mr. Lee, we will handle the advertising of this situation; we want you to handle the publicity of it."

I always wonder just exactly what they think they mean, because, as I understand publicity, it is the entire gamut of expression of an idea or of an institution, whereas advertising is a mere phase of publicity.

### PUBLICITY INCLUDES EVERYTHING USED TO EXPRESS AN IDEA

Publicity comprises advertising, of course; it comprises the radio, the moving picture, magazine

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\* Address delivered before American Association of Teachers of Journalism, Chicago, December 30, 1924, and in substantially the same form before the Advertising Club of New York, January 20, 1925.

Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not

articles, speeches, books, mass meetings, brass bands, parades; everything involved in the expression of an idea or of an institution—including the policy or the idea expressed.

Long ago I came to the conclusion that by far the most important aspect of any institution is not so much what it said about itself or what other people said about it, but what it did.

One of the best publicity men I ever knew was Mr. E. W. Winter, who was for many years president of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company. When Mr. Winter came to be president of that company it was in very bad odor. The policies of the company were extremely unpopular. Mr. Winter did not do any talking; he did not do any advertising; he did not make any speeches.

He simply went to work and made the policy of that company one more in accord with public sentiment. And I have always thought that Mr. E. W. Winter's work was real publicity.

A good many years ago, when I first went into what you may call publicity work, some corporation officers had an idea that they could frame up a policy and then turn it over to me to put over on

the newspapers; or could get up a statement of the situation, turn it over to me, and I would get it published.

**NEWSPAPERS PUBLISH AS NEWS  
ONLY WHAT PEOPLE WILL READ**

In the first place, nothing is more ridiculous than the idea that anybody can get the papers to print what he wants them to print. Men often send for me and say:

“We sent for you because they say you can get a thing on the first page of the newspapers.”

My reply to them always is:

“I cannot do anything of the kind. If you want a subject to get on the first page of the newspapers, you must have the news in your statement sufficient to warrant it getting on the first page.”

I know the editors of many newspapers; editors and reporters. I never ask them to print anything in their papers. In the first place, I think it is very bad business, very poor policy on the part of any-

one, to make such a request; and furthermore, I always feel that if I did make it, and the papers printed a story or article at my request—which they would not have printed if I had not asked them to—the people would not read it.

Editors of newspapers print what they do print because they have been taught by long experience that certain things, which are said to have news value, are the items which the public will be interested to read.

Their estimate of the news value of an article is entirely with reference to the probability of its being read by a substantial number of the readers of that publication.

Now if the trained judgment of these men does not make them feel that a particular item will be read, what is the use of getting it printed?

**IF IT WON'T BE READ  
IT IS FUTILE TO PRINT IT**

So when people tell you that things can be printed in the newspapers and when they appeal to men like myself to seek to get them printed, the reply is that it is futile to attempt it and, even if it

were successful, it would not accomplish the purpose sought.

The other day I was approached by a representative of a certain organization in New York, who told me that they were going to have a debate on the question of Public Ownership of Public Utilities. They expected to have the idea of public ownership advanced by a well known radical, and they were going to have the contrary side, the side of private ownership, represented by two gentlemen who were quite conservative and who would not say anything very thrilling such as would make newspaper headlines. This man told me that there had been question among his friends whether when this debate took place the agitators for public ownership would not get all the publicity and that the other side would not get a fair show.

So he was delegated to call upon me to ask me to see to it that the conservative side got a showing in the papers! I said:

“I have just one piece of advice to give you, and if I should study the case and consider it from now until the day of your debate, the advice would not be different; and that is to employ court stenographers to take down the

Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not

debate, just as is done at large political meetings, and thus give the newspapers, as it goes on, an authentic account of what takes place. If that does not get publicity for the conservative side, it will be because the conservative side has not said anything that was worth publishing.”

Most publicity problems can be resolved just as simply.

PEOPLE PAY FOR NEWS—  
ADVERTISERS PAY FOR ATTENTION

Did you ever try to frame a definition of news? And, did you ever try to frame one of advertising?

I have tried both; and I would like to give you the benefit, if such it be, of that effort.

News is that which is interesting to the public today.

That does not necessarily mean that it is an event that happened today; the event might have happened a thousand years ago; but if it is *interesting* to the people who read it *today*, it is news. It may be a poem by Rudyard Kipling, it may be the latest chapter in a popular novel that the people

are excited about. If the people are interested in reading it *today*, as distinguished from yesterday or tomorrow, it is news.

What is the distinction between news and advertising?

News is that which the people are willing to pay to have brought to their attention; while advertising is that which the advertiser himself must pay to get to the people's attention.

WHY BASEBALL IS NEWS  
WHILE MOTOR CARS ARE NOT

Let me illustrate that.

There is nothing in this country more commercial than professional baseball. It is just as commercial as the manufacture of automobiles or the running of department stores; yet the newspapers give enormous space to it. Kick against it, though they do, and try, as they will, to force the baseball magnates to advertise and to spend money in the newspapers, every newspaper publisher knows that if he does not give the baseball news from day to day, and his competitor does give it, his competitor is going to get the circulation. Therefore, he gives the baseball news, although there is no more glar-

ing case of so-called "free publicity" than professional baseball news.

It is a typical case of the value to a publisher of news of commercial facts. Professional baseball news is commercial facts which the people are willing to pay the newspaper to publish for them.

By the same token, if the Cadillac Motor Car Company wishes to get the facts concerning its development before the public, it must pay for the space to get them to the public, because the publisher knows that if he refuses to publish the news about the Cadillac and his competitor does publish it, the publisher failing to print the Cadillac news is not going to suffer any loss in his circulation. Therefore the Cadillac man knows that if he is going to get the facts before the public he must pay to bring them to their attention.

That is the distinction between news and advertising.

#### NEITHER VIRTUE NOR VICE IN "FREE PUBLICITY"

Any idea that there is any vice or virtue in so-called "free publicity" is, to me, perfectly absurd.

I have for a great many years seen this fight going on—with which some of you are perhaps familiar—to call off the press agent and to stop the distribution of “free publicity.” Some of the leading journals in the publishing business, *Editor and Publisher* and *Printer's Ink*, for instance, carry on a continuous propaganda—they would hate to call it propaganda, but that is what it is—designed to extinguish the life of what they call the press agent or the publicity man (which seem to be synonymous to them).

I have been engaged in this line of work for nearly twenty years. These people have kept on fighting during all that time, and my business has kept on growing.

There never were as many press agents, so-called, and there never were as many “publicity men” as there are today.

There was never so much so-called “free publicity” offered to the public as there is today, and if it wasn't found of value to somebody, it wouldn't be offered and printed.

To say that there is an inherent virtue or vice in so-called “free publicity”—a foolish phrase, by the way—is manifestly absurd.

NEWSPAPER EDITORS  
HAVE THE WHIP HAND

Sometimes I get letters from small country editors saying, "Take my name off your mailing list, we do not want to receive any more of your copy." One does not get letters like that except from small and unimportant publications. I always smile when I see such a letter.

But when I see a publication like the *Editor and Publisher* saying that newspapers should disregard all unsolicited matter that comes to them, it seems to me that advice is being given to editors which it would be foolhardy for the editors to accept.

If I was an editor and had offered to me any kind of information, I would welcome it with open arms; I would exercise my own judgment as to whether it was news or not, as to whether it was of any value to my readers. I would exercise such initiative and ingenuity as I wanted to employ to ascertain whether those facts were correct or not; I would do anything I pleased with the material offered to me; but as to objecting to having information offered to me, it seems to

me that by so doing I would convict myself of stupidity.

I think such an objection is just as foolish as it would be for my wife, when she goes to Macy's department store, to object because Macy puts so many attractive things on the shelves which she must pass by when she goes from one department to another. She has absolute control of the situation in her own pocketbook. *She does not have to buy these things.*

But these men who object to having "free publicity" offered to them, it seems to me, are just as logical as it would be for my wife to object because Macy's puts so many attractive things on their shelves.

#### PROPAGANDA VERSUS "ALL THE FACTS"

A great many people object to what they call propaganda. For instance, last Sunday I read in the papers a speech by the President of the United States, delivered to the Association of Newspaper Editors, in Washington, last Saturday.

In the course of his speech Mr. Coolidge said:

“Propaganda seeks to present a part of the facts, to distort their relations, and to force conclusions which could not be drawn from a complete and candid survey of all the facts.”

Then he says later on:

“Of real education and of real information we cannot get too much; but of propaganda . . . we cannot have too little.”

Will you kindly tell me of any situation in human history which has ever been presented to the people in the form of a candid survey of all the facts?

Last year the administration, Mr. Coolidge's administration—and this is not a political speech, simply an analysis of a process of thinking, because Mr. Coolidge's speech undoubtedly represents what I think is the ill-considered thinking of a great many people about this subject—last year the administration conducted one of the most active agitations ever known in this country for the passage of the so-called Mellon Plan.

Would Mr. Coolidge for one moment maintain that Mr. Mellon presented to the country a “com-

plete and candid survey of all the facts?" Why, Mr. Mellon was abused like a pickpocket in the Senate for not presenting the situation the way a lot of the Senators looked at it. Even Senator Couzens, of Michigan, a Republican, saw the thing in an entirely different light and actually forced Mr. Mellon to withdraw and to revise some of his figures.

I was in sympathy with the Mellon Plan, and thought Mr. Mellon's campaign most useful, but it was certainly propaganda, and it certainly did not offer a "complete and candid survey of all the facts."

TO GIVE "ALL THE FACTS"  
IS HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE

To present a complete and candid survey of all the facts concerning any subject is a human impossibility.

Walter Lippman, the well known editor of the *New York World*, in discussing this subject lately, said:

"There are several hundred thousand government employes, more Departments, Bureaus

and Commissions than you can shake a stick at, not to mention forty-eight States, 3,000 counties, no end of cities, at least 50 diplomatic missions, and official acts are being performed in all of them for several hours every day. Now assume that every one of these acts is reported to you every day in a newspaper, this ideal newspaper you seem to desire, which would be as thick as a telephone book and about as fascinating. Imagine yourself confronted with that newspaper. Would you read it for thirty minutes a day, for an hour, including the crossword puzzle?

“The whole of public affairs cannot be reported, and in that simple, and rather obvious, but unappreciated fact lies one of the fundamental problems of public opinion. Since everything can’t be reported, somebody has to pick out an act here and there for the citizen to notice. For this business first of selection and then of emphasis there are no complete and established intellectual standards. . . .

“In theory the public is supposed to be concerned about those events which most deeply affect its welfare and its happiness. But it is not so interested. The items the public finds interesting do not always and do not often coincide with its real interests. Unfortunately for

democracy, the interests of the public are not very interesting to the great public."

Besides, what is a fact? Did you ever ask yourself that?

If you and I were to go out of this room and walk up and down Madison Avenue and then come back and separately tell this audience what we had seen, I venture to say that no two of us would agree as to what we had observed.

I read once that absolute truth was something that could only be presented in the form of a mathematical equation, because that is abstract, and every two people will agree that the terms are the same, but, if I make a statement to you of what I believe to be an absolute fact, every person in this room is going to understand the statement differently because every word that I use will have a different connotation to every person who listens to me.

The effort to state an absolute fact is simply an attempt to achieve what is humanly impossible; all I can do is to give you my interpretation of the facts.

If my interpretation of the facts appeals to

you tonight as correct and sincere; if my interpretation seems to embody accurate observation and sound processes of reasoning, and I speak to you again tomorrow, you are going to pay considerable attention to me, you are going to believe in me to a considerable extent. And then if you find the next day it is the same way, and again the next day, and the next, you are going to believe in me more and more. But if after thinking it over tomorrow you find my interpretation of the facts tonight does not ring true, that it is contradicted by other facts you have ascertained, then when you come to hear me speak tomorrow night, you will discount a good deal of what I say because you will have found that what I said tonight did not stand the test.

#### GIVING SOURCES OF INFORMATION CURES EVILS OF PROPAGANDA

That is the whole process with reference to propaganda. It is a bad word; I wish I had some substitute for it, but after all it means the effort to propagate ideas, and I do not know any real derivative to substitute for the word: all that can

be involved in propaganda is a demand, which the public is entitled to make, that when it is given information upon which it is expected to form conclusions, it shall know who is doing the telling, who is responsible for the information.

The essential evil of propaganda is failure to disclose the source of information, and arises when the person who utters it is not willing to stand sponsor for it. Because, to utter a lie to the public is just as futile and will come back to plague you just as quickly as it will to utter a false check. If I draw a false check today it goes through the Clearing House tomorrow, is thrown out by the bank, and unless it is done in good faith and I think I have money in the bank, in 48 hours I shall be arrested.

If you utter a false statement to the public it will be pointed out very quickly because there are a million eyes that are just looking for every false statement that comes along. If a person utters an untruth to the public that person is going to stand well in the public eye for only a very short time. In order to protect myself against having the sources of my information perverted and poisoned I want to know who is telling me these

facts. If a man tells me the truth and keeps on telling me the truth, I will believe in him more and more as time goes on, just as you do in all the relations of life. But if a man or an institution tries to put something over on me or the public, we are going to get on to him very quickly.

So all of this talk about publicity, "free publicity," and the evils and menace of propaganda, it seems to me, can be resolved in the simplest possible way by just saying to editors:

"Use your judgment when information comes to your desk," and by saying to the public: "Exercise your right to demand knowledge as to the source of the information which is given concerning any fact."

I think if you will apply these rules you would find that practically all of the possible evils of publicity and propaganda can be cured.

## II

# Answers to Questions About Publicity

### I\*

- Q. I would like to ask what you consider proper propa-  
ganda and improper propaganda. Where the source  
is named, do you consider it proper?
- A. Absolutely. Suppose you go out of this room and  
issue a statement over your own signature espousing  
the cause of the Reds in Russia. I might wholly dis-  
agree with you, but I would say it was perfectly  
proper propaganda, for you have a right to say any-  
thing you like, as an American citizen. The only  
point is: what is the source? I feel that if the public  
knows that, that is all you will ever need in the way  
of protection. If you go out and emit lies, you are  
going to be discredited very quickly.
- Q. If you should send out an article on behalf of the  
Pennsylvania Railroad, justifying its opposition to  
the Railroad Labor Board, what would be the attitude

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\* These were asked and answered after address before American  
Association of Teachers of Journalism.

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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of the newspapers, as to printing it, seeing that it was received from you as publicity man?

- A. Well, they would not get it from me as publicity man of the Pennsylvania Railroad. They would get it from the Pennsylvania Railroad. The Pennsylvania Railroad Company would be responsible.

That brings up another point. A lot of people do not distinguish in this matter of publicity between the function and the title of the fellow who does the job. In my judgment the function is the whole thing. Judge Gary is the publicity man of the Steel Corporation. He does all of the talking for the Steel Corporation. He combines with that, incidentally, the capacity of chairman of the board of directors. The same is true of many corporation heads. The main point is, not the name, whether you call him publicity man, or what not, but whose responsibility is involved in the issuance of the statement.

- Q. Will you elaborate a little on the opportunities afforded along the lines of corporation publicity work, as mentioned by you a moment ago.
- A. Well, I think the opportunities are almost unlimited. Every corporation, every institution in the country, ought to have what, for want of a better term, we may call a publicity man. And then if he is a real man, he is going to become much more than a mere

press agent. As he develops, he is going to see that it is not merely a rubber stamp proposition. He will see that his job cannot be done if he is merely to have policies determined and then be told that he must "put them over." A self respecting man would very quickly resign if he found that that was to be his whole job. If he has personality, brains and judgment, he is going to be able very soon to show the heads of the corporation that the policy of the corporation is the vital thing, rather than the mere information that is put out to the public.

- Q. Do you not think that a great many people buy the papers simply for the advertising, and not to read any of the news matter?
- A. Suppose the papers did not have any news in them, would the people buy them just for the advertisements?
- Q. Do not many people buy papers simply to read the department store advertising particularly?
- A. Yes, but I question very seriously whether they would buy them if they did not have anything else in them. Take a paper like the *Chicago Daily News*. It works both ways there. The department stores advertise in the *Chicago Daily News* because they know it reaches practically every buying family in Chicago, and the women read the *Chicago Daily News* because all the department stores advertise in it.

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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Q. (By Prof. Cunliffe, of Columbia.) I gather from what you have said that you do agree to the proposition that there is such a thing as improper publicity. I have always contended that the difficulty is not with the proper publicity. I think that your definition of the distinction is a perfectly sound one; that is, that authorized publicity is perfectly proper. The difficulty is with improper publicity.

A. There is such a thing as proper and improper publicity, just as much as there is proper law and improper law, proper and improper legal procedure, proper methods of living and improper methods of living. As I view it, the whole matter comes right down to a question of simple honesty. If you sign your name to what you have to say, then I can decide whether or not you are an honest man. You may put over something that is not so, and you may be honest at that. Our distinguished fellow citizen, Honorable William J. Bryan, puts over lots of stuff that I know is not so, but he believes it. I have absolute confidence in his sincerity. Yet his is proper publicity.

I think the public mind is so influenced by the information that is put before it that the public is entitled to know the source of the information that reaches it.

Q. Is it not true that practically all of the objections which come to you on "free publicity" are from the

*Answers to Questions About Publicity*

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business departments, and not the editorial departments of newspapers?

- A. Most of the objections that come to me come from newspapers where the business department and the editorial department are one and the same thing. It is the small town publisher who is simply befuddled by the mass of propaganda and publicity matter that is sent to him. He throws up his hands and simply writes back the message, "Don't send me any more." The big newspapers know how to deal with it.
- Q. PROF. CUNLIFFE: It seems to me that there are two or three interests here; first of all, the interest of the public. The public is suspicious, because it thinks it is being humbugged. If all publicity were carried out on the principles which you have laid down, there would be no just ground for complaint, but as we know, in the way in which publicity is often carried out, the source is withheld, and a statement is simply made on the authority of the newspaper, which has come from an interested source, and that is open to public distrust. That is the public's end of it.

The professional end of it, which particularly interests us, is another angle. It may be one that interests you a good deal, Mr. Lee. That is, as it seems to me, the whole transformation of the art of gathering information for newspaper service. In the old days, when the community was small, you sent out

a bright, intelligent reporter who had no responsibility except to God and his newspaper, or to his newspaper and God. I think that is really the source of the hostility that we have encountered among newspaper men, who have no connection whatever with advertising, and were not influenced by advertising. They were influenced by their professional tradition.

Now, although we may say it softly in our own minds, the fact is that the reporting organization has fallen down on its job. I do not say that it has been the fault of the reporters, but it has become incapable of dealing with the vast, complex, modern life of a great city. The old village or small town way of sending out enterprising young men to gather up the news in the community has become impracticable, and the publicity agent, representing certain great interests, certain great corporations, which may be commercial organizations, academic corporations, or otherwise, has become possibly a necessity of our modern life. That is the real problem, as I see it professionally, that we are up against, and I know it is one that interests you a good deal.

- A. MR. LEE: There is no doubt about that, Prof. Cunliffe. We have got to face the fact that modern life is a very complex thing. The old-time sort of journalism that you speak of can be likened to the old days when law courts consisted of somebody selected as an arbitrator, before whom the friends of

the two sides would assemble the evidence and present the case as best they could. But in the course of time that developed into a system of courts, where we have lawyers on both sides to marshal the evidence, where the pleadings must be in accordance with accepted forms.

So in the person of the modern publicity man, we have someone who is marshaling the evidence for his side, in accordance with accepted forms, and the newspaper must adjust itself to that. If I were a newspaper man I should welcome every particle of information which any publicity man would give me, from any source, and then I should go to work to develop my story in my own way. I should insist upon seeing any of the principals whom I wanted to see. I should insist upon having first-hand access to anyone I thought had any information concerning this subject; and if I found persistently and consistently that some publicity man always told me the truth and never gave me a "wrong steer," I should in time come to place a great deal of dependence upon his word. Yet I should always exercise my judgment, my own ingenuity, and insist upon keeping the very best possible contact with the original sources of information.

If the publicity man is a barrier against newspaper men getting to the sources of information, he has no right to be there. The publicity man has no

right to deny you access to the real source of information. That does not mean that you have a right to ask every man in a responsible position to give you a personal interview about any question that you may want to ask him. But it does mean that you are entitled to a first-hand answer to any legitimate question.

- Q. Is not a great deal of the criticism against publicity due to the fact that institutions are endeavoring to put out as news that which should be put out as advertising, which is not of general interest, and for which they should pay, in order to get it to the public? There are two types of publicity. The representative gathering news of a specialized character, of an institution or corporation, which cannot be gathered by reporters efficiently, is very helpful and useful, but it seems to me that a great deal of criticism is directed against the other type of publicity, and that is that which is and should be treated as advertising, which is not really news.
- A. I think you are quite right. But the editor has the complete answer. All he has to do is to throw the material into the waste basket. Why worry when you walk through Wanamaker's store, because there are so many things on all sides of you? You do not have to buy them all. Of course, there is a great deal in the thought that many publicity men are very much more clever than some newspaper men, so that the

### *Answers to Questions About Publicity*

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less clever newspaper man does not know how to deal with the situation. The material offered seems so good that he does not dare throw it away, but he thinks it ought to be printed as advertising, so he is in a great quandary. It is a serious problem, but no different, it seems to me, from that which confronts my wife when she goes into a store full of attractive goods. She may want something very much. Perhaps she wouldn't have wanted it so badly if the store hadn't displayed it so attractively. But you cannot deal with a problem like that by abolishing department stores. My wife must be taught to discriminate, if she is not inclined in that direction already. And so it must be with newspaper editors when confronted with unsolicited material for publication. They must be taught to deal with the situation intelligently.

- Q. What would come under your definition of proper publicity?
- A. I think any publicity is proper that is honest.
- Q. At the present time most publicity is honest publicity, is it not?
- A. Well, you are asking me a big question. I do not know.
- Q. The danger in the situation, it seems to me, is that the publicity man, who is partial, is taking the place

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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of the reporter who should be impartial. The danger now is that of the partial man taking the place of the impartial man.

- A. If the presentation of news is going to become one-sided, and shall continue like that, I admit that it will be a very dangerous situation.
- Q. I wonder if you could tell us where we could find information showing to what extent the more important business concerns have organizations for publicity, aside from organizations for paid advertising.
- A. I think practically every institution in the country which ought to advertise, has an advertising department. I think a very large number, if not all, of the more important corporations have today something tantamount to a publicity department. Of course, as I said, I view publicity as embracing advertising. I am constantly advising my clients to advertise, but it is not because of any ethical preference for advertising as against so-called publicity. It is because I want to call attention to certain things, and I cannot do that except through advertising. Advertising is the effective way to project an idea in a great many instances.
- Q. You spoke about a publicity man establishing certain relations with newspapers, so that after they become

more or less convinced that he gives honest publicity, they will listen to what he brings up. Now, I can see how an honest publicity man would not for any reason make a statement that would be wrong, or against the public interest, but take the case of the Pennsylvania Railroad, just for example, and say that they are going to announce a very important change in policy, something new, and that is given to you to send out. You are doubtful of it. Just how far do you have to convince yourself, or do you have to convince yourself at all, before you send it out? It seems to me, if publicity men are to retain confidence, they should not send out anything, even from a great corporation, without being very sure about it.

- A. Well, I would not have any corporation send out a statement of fact which I knew absolutely was a deliberate lie. I might send out over their name, and not over my own, a statement of policy, of opinion, with which I did not agree. They would be responsible for it. If I advise a corporation as best I can, then it is the corporation's own responsibility to make its decision.

A publicity man's character comes very quickly to be his stock in trade very much as with a lawyer. Every man has got to work according to his own conscience, with a knowledge that one whose ethical standards are low is going to be quickly discredited,

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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and that the man whose ethical standards are high is going to gain the public confidence.

Q. DEAN ALLEN: Is it ethical for a publicity man to ever send anything to the papers for publication that he believes serves his client, but does not serve the reader?

A. MR. LEE: I think the only answer I could make to that would be that a publicity man is no different from anybody else. He cannot do a dishonest thing and get away with it. You are employed by a corporation. The heads of that corporation believe a certain policy to be wise, or, if you like, to be in their interest. You may not believe that policy to be in the public interest. That is what you mean, I take it, and your question is, are you then entitled to give publicity to an advocacy of that policy?

Q. DEAN ALLEN: Yes.

A. MR. LEE: Certainly not, over your own name. But the institution is entitled to issue it over its name. I may have my views concerning a situation, and urge those views upon my client. The client may think, and think honestly, quite differently—and he may be right.

Q. DEAN ALLEN: If it was not serving the reader, though, it would not be proper publicity?

A. MR. LEE: I insist that proper publicity is anything that is honest. For instance, get back to the poli-

ticians that I mentioned a few moments ago. William Jennings Bryan utters a great deal of stuff that I think is very injurious to the readers, but he is honest about it. Error dreads nothing so much as the light, and I as a member of the public would not want anything better than to have a corporation that is wrong go before the public and tell the public that it thinks it is right. The very fact of that publicity is going to be the surest corrective of the error. People who are wrong, mostly, as a result, do not want publicity. If you find a fellow who is really looking for publicity, he is apt to think he is right.

- Q. Does not the newspaper man face exactly the same problem, when he is sent out to get information?
- A. I think that is somewhat different, because there the reporter is supposed to see for the public. A corporation or an institution is avowedly speaking in its own interest, and you may discount its statements on that basis.
- Q. DEAN ALLEN: Did I understand you to say that proper publicity should serve the interest of the reader?
- A. MR. LEE: No, sir. I said proper publicity is any publicity that is honest.
- Q. DEAN ALLEN: And acknowledged?
- A. MR. LEE: Acknowledged, and responsible. Who is

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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to determine whether it serves the interests of the reader or not? That is the point. The reader has got to determine that, whether it serves his interests or not. All of us are apt to try to think that what serves our own interests is also in the general interest. We are very prone to look at everything through glasses colored by our own interests and prejudices.

- Q. My opinion is that much of the matter published as news in the newspapers does not serve the interests of the readers.
- A. Well, who is to be the judge of that. Is that not the editor's job?
- Q. I am not prepared to say who shall do it. But it seems to me that if it does not serve the interests of the readers, it does not come within the category that you have referred to here.
- A. But how are you going to determine that? Suppose I issue a statement. I may believe that it does serve the interests of the public. You have a right to disagree with me. But am I not entitled to a hearing?
- Q. Is it ethical of a publicity man to try to put something over—using that term in its ordinary sense—on the editor, and through him on his readers?
- A. Well, if you mean by "trying to put something over," doing it dishonestly, I should say, no.

- Q. Do you consider that the reader is fairly well safeguarded if he knows the source?
- A. Even the most clever man, if he constantly utters lies or half lies, or takes an unsocial position, sooner or later will be found out by the public. Is not the surest corrective of error the very publication of an unsound position? I have followed my profession for twenty years, and I have never in all that time seen the smallest kind of error of fact issued in a public statement but what the very next day somebody called it to public attention, even statements issued in the utmost good faith. An incorrect statement given to the press is just like issuing a bad check; you will get it back tomorrow from the bank, through the Clearing House. If you issue an untruth in a public statement, it is going to be challenged just as soon as it sees the light.

Even the most unintentional error in a statement is challenged immediately, and my experience has been that you usually get the corrections first from the people inside of your own company. It is remarkable to me how very sensitive officials of a corporation are themselves to having misstatements of fact put out concerning their own company. Take a great railroad like the Pennsylvania Railroad. If the Pennsylvania Railroad issues a statement, every man on that railroad considers that statement when he reads it in the paper the next morning, and if it has

*Publicity, Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*

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the smallest error of fact, statistics or suggestion in it, you will hear about it immediately. And the chief urge to make the correction public will come from inside the company.

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Q. Aside from the publicity end of it and advertising, take the question of stating a fact, how would you consider a statement or an axiom or a truth that is known? Take for instance the axiom or statement "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

A. That is a mathematical equation. I cannot think of a single statement of a truth you can make other than a mathematical equation, a mathematical fact, that is not going to be interpreted by every person who hears it or states it a little bit differently.

Of course, I grant you that many differentiations are extremely subtle and infinitesimal. But when the President states what he does about a "complete and candid statement of all the facts," and then when you go and compare that with what he actually sanctioned in the presentation of the case for the Mellon plan, you will see the inconsistency of the two propositions.

Q. Mr. Lee, have you any figures to show approximately what percentage of the news in the newspapers is the

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\* These questions were asked and answered after address before Advertising Club of New York.

## *Answers to Questions About Publicity*

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result of so-called free publicity? I have heard it is about 70 per cent. Is it really as high as that?

A. I have not the slightest idea.

Q. I do not quite get, though, what the service of the publicity man is.

Outside of the fact that he must prepare the story that is to be given out, what other functions does he have, unless it be to be friendly with the editors and reporters?

A. So far as the contact is concerned I may state that I have been called by some people a press agent, and have been doing this sort of work for about twenty years, and during that time I do not believe I have been in the office of a New York newspaper four times. Personal contacts do not amount to anything. If the material is of any value it gets published on its intrinsic merits.

The great publicity man is the man who advises his client as to what policy he shall pursue, which, if pursued, would create favorable publicity.

The function of the publicity man, once the policy has been determined and the action decided upon, is to draw up the facts in a clear cut manner so that the newspapers and the public will get the full significance of it, from the point of view of the institution making the announcement.

Q. Are the newspapers influenced in recognizing what is news and publishing news suggested by the large advertiser?

A. Not to a great extent. Naturally if you are a big advertiser and you ask a newspaper to print something that is otherwise unobjectionable, the chances are that it will be given favorable attention. But rarely is that controlling, less and less so in a city like New York where there is more advertising offered to the papers than they can print anyway: they are constantly raising their advertising rates in order to keep down the amount of it. I really think that aside from the human influences that come into all the activities of life, the newspapers are fairly immune from improper influence of that kind.

Q. Is not a newspaper's real duty to the public to give what is happening and not merely give what the public likes to read?

A. Someone has described the difference between English newspapers and American newspapers as this: that the English newspapers print what is important and the American newspapers print what is interesting.

The newspaper is made to sell. The newspaper prints that which is going to sell the largest number of copies to the class of readers it is seeking to reach, and I fear that as long as newspapers are commercial institutions, this is apt to continue to be the case.

*Answers to Questions About Publicity*

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Q. Does that affect the angle of free publicity at all?

A. I do not think so. By that criterion take a paper like the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* has an enormous amount of free publicity offered to it. The *New York Times* has a definite news policy, which is to print material which it feels will interest its 600,000 readers. The *New York Times* judges of the free publicity offered to it in accordance with what it feels will be of interest to its clientele.

### III

## Publicity

# As Applied to Public Service Corporations\*

**P**UBLICITY must not be thought of as it is by a good many as a sort of umbrella to protect you against the rain of an unpleasant public opinion.

Publicity must not be regarded as a bandage to cover up a sore and enable you to get along pretty well with the real trouble still there.

Publicity must, if your trouble is to be cured, be considered rather as an antiseptic which shall cleanse the very source of the trouble and reveal it to the doctor, which is the public.

To change the metaphor again, publicity must not be thought of as a cloak to look well on the outside of a body deformed and diseased within.

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\* An address before the Annual Convention of the American Electric Railway Association, October 10, 1916.

It must be looked on rather as a social X-ray which shall reveal the bone and the tissue, even the very heart, of the body itself.

No one must attempt to adopt publicity or make use of it for his benefit unless he is prepared to take all the consequences.

A company cannot sing of its prosperity to security holders and at the same time cry over its poverty to tax appraisers and its workingmen.

EVERY CORPORATION SHOULD  
FIRST BE HONEST WITH ITSELF

Publicity is distinctly a weapon that cuts both ways, and unless a man is willing to tell everything openly, he had better not "monkey" with publicity. If his desire is simply to avail himself of publicity where it benefits him, and to get behind the curtain when he does not want publicity, my advice to him is to let it alone.

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In adopting a policy of publicity any company should establish clearly to its own satisfaction that it is pursuing a policy which is as reasonable as,

under the conditions, it can pursue. Such a company should be sure it is doing the best it can even if under difficult conditions.

Things may not be as you would like to have them, and there are a great many improvements you would like to have made, but be sure conditions are the best that you yourself can make. If they are not the best, at any rate make sure you are trying as hard as you know how to make them so.

#### FUNDAMENTAL AXIOMS IN DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC

Having arrived at that policy the next step is to pin one's faith on certain fundamental beliefs:

*First*—The first and most important of these axioms is that the people are intelligent and will not submit to having something put over on them.

*Second*—We should make up our minds and believe firmly in the fact that the American people are fair, once they know the facts.

Sometimes the people are slow in arriving at what seems to be a fair decision. But in the long run I believe that the heart of the American rings

true, and that if we are reasonable and are doing the best we can, we can be sure that a presentation of the situation as we see it, and as it appears reasonable to us, will also appeal as being reasonable to the American people.

But, as the President of the United States not long ago very correctly said, the people are not moved by mind, they are moved by sentiment. In developing a policy of publicity we cannot expect merely to reason the case out, merely to present statistical data and arithmetical equations, and have the people draw from these statements the conclusions we should like them to draw.

People are interested in their own affairs, they are not very much interested in your affairs and they will not analyze statistics.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF A PUBLICITY POLICY

The fundamental purpose, therefore, which must underlie any policy of publicity must be to induce the people to believe in the sincerity and honesty of purpose of the management of the company which is asking for their confidence.

If the men who are in charge of a particular company enjoy the complete confidence of the people of that community, fifty per cent of that company's troubles are over.

With such men enjoying the confidence of the people, telling the people the truth, and the people believing it, the people in the long run will do what these men believe to be reasonable, because the people will believe in them and in the fact that what they believe to be reasonable—is reasonable. The first object of any policy of publicity, I therefore repeat, is that the management itself gain the personal confidence of the people.

#### THE FIRST NECESSITY IN SOUND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Publicity in its ultimate sense means the actual relationship of a company to the people, and that relationship involves far more than *saying*—it involves *doing*. An elementary requisite of any sound publicity must be, therefore, the giving of the best possible service.

You may say that the people ask better service

than you can give with the money at your disposal, and that you can give perfect service if you have the money.

But, gentlemen, good service consists in many things which do not involve money. It does not cost more money to induce your employes to be courteous to the people who ride on the cars. Nothing could be more helpful to the street railways and steam railways of the United States than an active campaign on behalf of "courtesy first"—courtesy on the part of employes toward the public.

#### WHERE "COURTESY FIRST" MUST BEGIN

Courtesy is not something which the manager can tell his employes to exercise towards the public and then himself be very economical in its use towards his employes. Employes of most companies take their tone from the man at the head, and if the man at the head expects his employes to be courteous to the public he must himself be most courteous to his employes. And that does not cost any money.

It does not cost money to give serious and

thorough attention to complaints. If one complaint is made, it is a pretty safe assumption that a good many other persons are affected by the thing complained of, and haven't said anything.

A man who makes a reasonable complaint to a company should be regarded as a friend, and the complaint should be carefully examined. If you can correct the trouble, it ought to be corrected. If you cannot correct it, nothing will do you more good than a frank and candid explanation to the one who makes the complaint, giving the reasons why it cannot be helped or was not helped.

One of the best things any public service company could do would be to publish a Kicker's Bulletin, in which the company would publish every kick made against the service as well as the answer made to the kick. Nothing in the world pleases a kicker, whether he has expressed himself or not, more than to see his kick in print and know it has been expressed.

#### THE PERSONAL ATTITUDE OF A MANAGEMENT

Another thing that does not cost money is the *tone*, the personal attitude of the officers of the

company toward their patrons, toward the newspapers and toward the community in which they work and live.

If the people feel that the spirit of a management is hard, indifferent and irresponsive to the wishes, feelings and emotions of the community, they are not going to care much what happens to the company.

But if the people feel that the company is up against a pretty hard job, that its managers are doing the best they can, the public is very apt to sympathize with the managers in their troubles.

NOT NECESSARY FOR A  
MANAGER TO BE A TALKER

It is not absolutely necessary that a railway manager should be a talker. I believe the most important thing is that he should be a *doer*.

The attitude of saying and doing involves an attitude of open mindedness toward new things.

It is a fatal blunder in policy for the management of any public service company to assume an

attitude of complacency and satisfaction with conditions as they are.

The public expects a company to be alive to every invention, to every development.

When the trolley lines grew up they were fought by the railroads. That was short-sighted—and now the railroads know it.

When the telephone was invented, its growth was retarded by opposition of the telegraph. But now the telephone is an indispensable aid to the telegraph.

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Take the case of the jitney. The jitney undoubtedly represents a response to a demand on the part of the people.

The fact that the jitney is irresponsible, that it ought to charge a higher fare, that the business is now being badly conducted, does not alter the fact that the jitney does respond to a legitimate demand.

I have heard many people say, "We do not insist upon a five-cent jitney—we are willing to pay ten cents—but we do believe that if it is possible to provide the kind of transportation for ten

cents that we require, that it ought to be possible for us to have it. We should be able, if we want to, to be picked up and carried directly to our homes quickly, instead of by the slow-moving trolley. If we can get some one to provide that kind of transportation, we ought to have it."

The street railway companies will have to work out a real solution of the jitney problem.

#### RAILROAD MANAGERS MUST SHOW THEY ARE HUMAN

As another fundamental element in any policy of publicity, I suggest the necessity of being sympathetic toward patrons, especially in reference to accidents.

The public is apt to get the idea that the railroads are only concerned about accidents because of the amount of money that will have to be paid to settle claims. The announcements of accidents made by some companies sound almost heartless. They do not seem to show any sympathy for the people who are suffering.

Yet men who run railroads have the same flesh and blood, the same human feelings as any one else.

When an accident happens, why cannot they let the people know of their distress at the sufferings of the people who have been hurt?

### **A PURELY SELFISH POLICY IS NOT A GOOD POLICY**

A sound policy of publicity for a public utility company also involves the adoption of an attitude of citizenship rather than a merely selfish relation to the community at large.

What I mean is illustrated in the present policy of the Western Union Telegraph Company concerning government ownership. The men who manage that company say:

“We do not know whether government ownership is the best thing or not. We have confidence that if government ownership is adopted, we will be compensated for our property at its actual value. We conceive our duty at the present time to be to give the very best possible service; next to that, to give the people all the information we can that will lead them to a sound decision on this question.

“We believe that in any government ownership investigation our chief value will be as an

expert witness. Our first position is as a citizen. If it is best for the American people to have government ownership of the telegraph, The Western Union Company says they ought to have that government ownership. We do not think it will be wise, but we may be wrong. We will try to help you find out if it is wise."

That expresses a policy which might well be adopted by public utilities with reference to many municipal ownership contests.

\* \* \*

While it is true that *being* and *doing* is the most important element in any company's policy, it is also true that, although you may give most excellent service, although you may be doing all the things that you ought to do, although you may *be* all the things you ought to be, the public is very apt to take all for granted, just as, for example, it takes its water supply for granted. So long as the water is good, the people do not think much about it, but the moment it is the least bit contaminated, or the supply is diminished, everybody gets excited.

WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO TELL  
WHAT YOU ARE DOING

There is a good deal of that element in the attitude of the public toward all public utilities, and that makes it necessary that you should *tell* the public what you are doing. It is impossible to tell it to enough people by word of mouth, so you have to tell it with printer's ink.

Byron says:

*"Words are things, and a small drop of ink,  
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think."*

In telling things through the medium of printers' ink you must tell the things that are interesting.

As an illustration, the general manager of the Pennsylvania Railroad some years ago on a very cold day sent out a notice to every track gang foreman—because of the fact that a great many of the track men on account of the cold would probably be wearing ear muffs—that upon the approach of a train, when the foreman blew his whistle, the foreman should see to it that every man *knew* he

had whistled, and not take it for granted the men had heard the whistle.

**THE PUBLIC INTERESTED  
IN WHAT IS HUMAN**

That item was human. It was interesting. It was published all over the United States, and impressed people with the fact that the management of the Pennsylvania Railroad exercised sympathetic care for its men. A little fact of that kind has more weight in forming public opinion than a great mass of arguments.

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A similar item of interest was the summer time practice of a well known street railway company in supplying its employes with three newly laundered white duck suits of clothes a week.

Very few people knew of this. They saw these men each day wearing these nice clean suits of clothes. They took it for granted. But if the people realized that the company was supplying these suits to the men free, and providing free

laundry service, the public would appreciate better the spirit of the management.

**SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE  
PEOPLE—AND AVOID LAWYERS  
WITH LEGALISTIC MINDS**

In the use of printer's ink be human, be natural, and speak in the language of the people.

The greatest thing that could be done for the street railways and the steam railroads, in fact for all utilities of the United States, would be to do for them what Billy Sunday has done for religion.

The wonderful thing about Billy Sunday is that he speaks the language of the man who rides on the trolley car and goes to ball games, who chews gum and spits tobacco juice. The people know Billy Sunday and he knows them. He goes to the heart of a subject. He moves men and affects their conduct in life far more than many sermons preached in the most cultivated English.

In trying to express yourselves in language which the people can understand, avoid lawyers. I have seen more situations which the public ought to understand and which the public would sympa-

thize with, spoiled by the intervention of the lawyer than in any other one way. Whenever a lawyer starts to talk to the public, he shuts out the light. He may illuminate legal procedure, but the public has little idea of what he means to say.

Fully one hundred years ago, Edmund Burke wrote that lawyers had

*"So bewildered the world and themselves in organizing forms and ceremonies and so perplexed the plainest matters with metaphysical jargon, that it carries the highest danger to a man out of that profession to make the least step without their advice and assistance."*

And H. G. Wells in one of his latest books says:

*"Lawyers trail into modern life most of the faults of a medieval guild. Their law and procedure have not been remodeled upon the framework of modern ideas; their minds are still set to the tone of medieval bickering. Our urgent need is not so much to get rid of the lawyer from our affairs as to get rid of the wig and gown spirit, and to find and develop the new lawyer."*

There are, to be sure, some "new lawyers." But they are more human beings than lawyers.

The traditional lawyer enveloped in "the wig and gown spirit" often has more regard for rights than for the right. To him precedents are all and in all, traditions must be followed, and professional etiquette is sacred above everything else.

**THE PEOPLE ARE THE  
REAL POWER**

I yield to no man in respect for courts of law, but the lawyer is apt to feel that courts, legislatures and public service commissions are awe-inspiring institutions to be treated as finalities. He forgets that they are created by the people. He goes to these tribunals always, and disregards the people—the fountain of all power. **I BELIEVE IN TELLING YOUR STORY TO THE PUBLIC.**

If you go direct to the people and get the people to agree with you, you can be sure that ultimately legislatures, commissions, and everybody else must give way in your favor.

\* \* \*

I believe in paying every respect to constituted authority, but if constituted authority makes mis-

takes it is the duty of every citizen to make his voice heard in protest. If the people are with you in opposition to a law or a decision of some tribunal, the law and the decision will sooner or later be *changed*.

You may say that is a short sighted policy, that it will do you harm and that you must cater to commissioners and constituted authorities.

But public service commissions have been making terrible blunders of judgment in recent years. Most commissioners are honest personally, but often they are playing present politics, and little know how their policies will affect the public in the long run.

Let the people know, and if you are right you will win.

#### MEN WHO RUN CORPORATIONS ARE NOT MERE MACHINES

Let the people also know that in dealing with the heads of street railway and public utility corporations, they are dealing with human beings and not mere machines.

Do not be afraid of public prejudice. It is true

the fetish of the five-cent fare is one to which all knees bend, but even the five-cent fare has been overridden.

Mr. McAdoo, who was a very successful electric railway president, once induced the people of New York City, Jersey City and surrounding country to agree to a seven-cent fare, simply by the way he put it up to them.

If the people want the service and if it cannot be given for a five-cent fare, you can persuade them in the long run to pay more for it. It is a process of education, a process in the working out of which the people will have to be shown.

The people are now gradually adjusting themselves to the six-cent loaf of bread, and they are going to adjust themselves to the increased prices of a great many things. A process of education, with reference to the cost of service, will, in all cases, where it can be justified, bring about a great improvement in the public attitude.

#### WHY TAKE NEWSPAPERS INTO YOUR CONFIDENCE?

In dealing with the public, in telling your story in printers' ink, you must, of course, deal with the

newspapers. Take them thoroughly into your confidence, not merely as newspapers, but as representing the public.

Put your relations with the newspapers absolutely upon a frank and candid basis.

Charge the papers for what you do, and pay them for what you get, so that both sides know exactly what is being done.

#### USE ALL THE ADVERTISING SPACE YOU CAN PAY FOR

Use all the advertising space that you can afford to pay for. The people are interested in so many other things that you have to make special efforts to get their attention. Many things will be published as news in the news columns of the papers, but the people do not always read the news columns.

The great value of advertising space is not merely to get the thing into the paper—you can often get something in as news—but it is to be able to command your location in the paper, to be able to write your own headlines, and to be able to lay out your own typographical display. In this way

you can command the attention of the people at least for a fleeting moment.

And unless you can get the attention of the people away from the great mass of things which are claiming their notice nowadays, there is really not much object in having the thing printed at all.

\* \* \*

To summarize, let me suggest that the *being* and *doing* are far more than the saying, that a man who goes into a policy of publicity must believe absolutely that he is right and that he can justify his policy upon the theory that "truth loves open dealing," and that he can rely absolutely upon the refining and sterling value of the truth.

If you devote yourself to making the public know the facts, you can have full confidence in the fact that knowledge by the public of what the truth is will make you free.